

**Organic Advisory Board  
June 27, 2006  
USDA Agricultural Research Station  
Wapato, WA**

**Members Present:** Michael Blakely (Growing Things), Michele Catalano (Consumer Representative), Dan Dufault (Emmanuel Enterprises), David Granatstein (WSU), Harold Ostenson (Double O Organics/Stemilt Growers), Steve Hallstrom (Tolt Gardens), Marilyn Lynn (Rama Farm), Harold Austin (Zirkle Fruit), Phil Unterschuetz (IFM), Aaron Avila (GS Long), Dain Craver (Craver Organic),

**Members Absent:** Andrea Pipitone (Pipitone Farm), Bob Pearson, Jennifer Hall, Jay Gordon

**Guests:** none

**WSDA Staff Present:** Miles McEvoy, Katherine Withey

**Recording:** Katherine Withey

**Announcements:** none

**Public Comment:** none

**State Organic Program**

The legislative proposal discussed at the April OAB meeting has been submitted to agency. The agency replied that it will not request this legislation. This decision is based on several factors: A lot of work for the agency, revenue for the program would be limited. Director Loveland is concerned there wasn't support from people who would be paying the fees. Also, legislation pertaining to becoming a State Organic Program (SOP) is not a priority, the agency has other priorities.

However, Miles would like to continue to move forward to be a SOP by submitting an application to the NOP. We can increase enforcement by using state statute and powers of the state dept. of ag to enforce appropriate labeling, but would not have the fees to fund this particular portion of the program. Miles would like to move forward with enforcement without the legislative proposal to increase fees through rule change. One possibility is that we could write rules that would require businesses certified by outside certifiers to report to us. Steve Hallstrom supports this move and recognizes the importance for our state.

Options: 1. Enforce given our resources, 2. Apply for SOP status from NOP, gives enhanced authority and increased responsibility, 3. Develop rules to set up guidelines for what ACA's that are working in the state regarding their requirements for operating in our state. This may include reporting of crop, acreage, etc.

Needs: 1. Staff, 2. Time. The added responsibilities of becoming a SOP mean more time and staff will be needed.

OFP has been more assertive in handling complaints and requirements for certification for particular operations. Example: Bakery making organic claims that wasn't certified. We worked with them to change their labels to make them compliant with an exempt operation.

Michele Catalano asked about the bakery whose business was “organica” and was not certified. Miles said that they looked into it but could not remember the details. Details of the complaint investigation will be forwarded to the board.

### **European Organic Program**

OAB performed an audit of the EOVP program. Final report is not available at this time. A written response to the findings and corrective actions are forthcoming. Further discussion on this item postponed until meeting

**TASK – EOVP audit final report completed and sent to all Board Members in July**

### **Amendments to Organic Certification Fees**

I.T. Staff meeting discussed how to change the database to implement the fee proposal. The database currently cannot support the type of fee change being proposed and updating the database to handle the change would cost approximately \$45,000. A new database will be completed by 2008-09. Another meeting will be on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June to identify areas within the proposal that will not be costly to implement. We can raise “rates,” i.e. late fees, without cost, but implementing complex new fee ideas, such as supplemental fees for split operations or livestock operations, are cost prohibitive.

Articles in the Quarterly Report would give producers, processors and handlers a heads-up that fee increases are coming.

**TASK - Miles will write a revised fee increase proposal and send it out to the OAB in July.**

*Budget:* \$33,000 surplus at the end of the fiscal year. Growth is significant, along with that comes growing pains. We’re maxed out with staffing and will need to add employees to maintain level of customer service. Dairies and material registration program are growing significantly, as well as row crops and tree fruit. Budget will need to be developed which includes staff increases and project how the budget will look for the next fiscal year.

Bob Gore is the new deputy directory, replacing Bill Brookerson. OFP will meet with him on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June to give him a picture of where the program is at currently and our plans for the future (fee increase, staff increase, office space, strategic plans, etc).

### **Materials**

**Sulfur Burners** – Petition sent in by Harman Inc. to have sulfur burners added to the National List. The only problem is that the applicant is proposing to have *his* sulfur burner allowed, not all sulfur burners. Miles thinks it was because the petition was not in the specific formatted as per NOP. Petition contains proprietary information and may be limited in circulation due to that concern. It’s important to understand where the application is in the process.

**Treated posts with plastic covers** – Aaron suggests adopting verbage that is more accepting that allows for some flexibility and would be more accommodating for the grower that needs to create trellis'. The grower can develop a plan that we would agree to that would address how they will prevent contamination of the soil and crops.

There is a question of whether plastic is sufficient or not. This information was based on inspectors observations. Dan would like to understand more about how we came to the determination that plastic is not sufficient. Harold Austin also would like to explore ideas of using thicker-grade plastic.

Dan will take the lead and submit a proposal that may allow plastic to be used under certain conditions. Phil and David will be talking and exploring some alternatives.

**TASK - Dan will take the lead on covering treated wood posts with plastic and submit a proposal that may allow plastic to be used under certain conditions.**

## **OAB Advisory Board Business**

### *Farm Walk with Valoria Loveland*

The director would like to go out on an organic farm walk. Michelle was thinking that it could be a dairy or an Eastern Washington tree fruit operation. Andrew Stout's farm might be appropriate, as there are several certified operations in the same area. There is a cooperative area that includes Stout, Michelle Blakely and a PCC land trust and some transitioning dairies in eastern King County. Harold Austin volunteered his treefruit operation, which would include a trip on a helicopter and packing facility.

### *Approval of April Minutes*

**MOTION** – Approve April 13, 2006 OAB meeting minutes. Motion made by Aaron Avila, Seconded by Marilyn Lynn, Vote unanimous. **Motion Passed**

### *Board Composition*

What are the membership guidelines and what the needs are within the organic industry. As the industry evolves, there is a need to ensure that the Board evolves with the industry and provides a relationship with the OFP and the industry that is pertinent and constructive.

- *Size of Board* – management and cost of having a larger Board needs to be considered. There must be at least 12 members, but there is no limit. A few years ago, 15 members were determined to be a 'good' number, but it was noted that the actual 'good' number is the amount of people that adequately represent the organic industry (currently, we are light on the large processor representation). It may be appropriate to put a cap on the amount of people on the Board to ensure that it is a manageable and effective group.
- *Subcommittees* - There can be stronger subcommittee work that does not exclusively comprise of Board members. This may be a way to include people who want to be on the Board when there is no space as well as to bring in representatives from under-served categories (grains, processors, etc.) Miles notes that committees can be difficult. Some issues include: 1. Hard to coordinate and work with from the Program's perspective. It requires a lot of staff support and Miles isn't sure if the OFP is set up to provide staff support. 2. Committees are most effective when there is a specific need.

There needs to be an identified goal for a successful committee. An example would be to create a treefruit committee could convene to address ideas such as sulfur burners and treated posts. Exploring other technologies may be an option for easing the burden of communication for committees, both on OFP staff side and on the Board side. For example, a Yahoo group might be an ideal venue for communication.

- *Alternate Board Members* may be a way to include other groups in involvement with the Board. Alternates would be someone that is included in the Board minutes and notes and have showed interest in being involved, but is a non-voting member. They would be the first in line if a Board seat opened up.
- *Courting possible Board Members* - Is it appropriate to 'court' or invite new Board members? The approach may need to be reconfigured and we need to be up-front about whether we are inviting their membership or inviting their application. It should be clear that we are inviting applications, and if they are a fit then they may be considered for the Board.

**TASK - Michelle will review the list of possible candidates that has been developed by Brenda Book and will develop discussion points for the next meeting.**

Continuing and Future Board Needs: 1. Adequate representation, 2. Alternate Board members, 3. Effective committees

### **Materials not in producers system plan and used by the producer**

Aaron indicated that there should be no problem regarding a grower that uses a material that is in their system plan. They should be allowed to use any material as long as they are approved. He is opposed to non-compliances issued for using a material that is not in the system plan. Dan concurs with this.

Miles – The Organic System Plan (OSP) is a requirement for certification and this plan must be approved by the certifier. It is a NOP requirement that producers provide a list of all materials in the system plan. Annotations for specific materials must be followed and producers must also implement strategies such as preventative pest management plan that must be approved by the certifier. Trainings with the NOP indicated that certifiers need to pay more attention to the system plan and that they provide a complete picture of the system, including materials. WSDA is being more assertive around making sure that OSP are complete. It is understood that plans will change, these changes can be captured in the annual update. The NOP would like to see growers contacting their certifier for approval prior to application.

If there is a significant deviation between the plan and the practice, there should be a NONC issued.

Can the plan be updated at the time of inspection? It would seem logical, however, an inspection report cannot substitute for an OSP update. There may be a possibility where the inspector can provide a document to give to the grower to have them update their system plan.

### **Open Forum**

"Evolution of a Organic Organizations in a Changing World" presentation is posted on the Website.

Discussions with USDA regarding rule changes and reaccreditation. We have to submit our reaccreditation application in October. Education and research continues to keep Washington

as a leader in the country for organics. Specifically, we are recognized as the leader in tree fruit and the largest state department of agriculture Certification agency. There has been some discussion about the material registration process, some ACA's have had some NOP enforcement issues around trying to develop material registration program.

Miles invited to speak in Rome at an IFOAM organic certification conference.

**Agenda Items for Next Meeting (October 26, 2006 in Ellensburg):**

European Organic Program

➤ EOVP Review by the OAB

How to petition NOP to require inspections during the transition period – Miles indicated that there is movement from within the NOP to move in that direction.

Membership Committee

**Handouts:**

Organic Advisory Board Membership Guidelines and Current Composition

Letter of Support for Sulfur Burners from SoilTech Northwest, Inc.

OFP Materials not in producers system plan and used by producer

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